

January 23, 2023

Your Honor:

I am the mother of George Pickard, who is being sentenced this week. I would like to speak to you of George as I know him.

George is my fourth child. Consistent with the 23 years to follow - of George being a Force of Nature - he arrived LARGE. I have big babies, but George topped them all, weighing 11 pounds, 6 ounces at birth. He was a sturdy and energetic child, social and happy. Seeking, always seeking. He wanted to experience it all. At the beach, I knew to watch closely, because while other children tested the water, George would immediately RUN, full speed, into the ocean. One afternoon when he was four, he went too far and got in trouble. His 10 year old brother Joe noticed, and went out to help, but soon both the boys were struggling. Joe could have made it back to land, but would not leave George until the lifeguard arrived. Another time, when George was about 2, he climbed the open drawers of a dresser, and it started to tip over on top of him. This time, 5 year old Luke was nearby, and held the dresser up while calling for help. Joe, Luke and George, born within five years of each other, are still the close-knit "Brothers Club."

When George was 9, he became anxious. A few weeks into third grade, his teacher called, concerned about his "worrying," that it made him unhappy and distracted him from paying attention in class. George was observing the world and trying to figure it out. It troubled him. We supported him as he tried to find his place. Through the years George was restless; never satisfied with what was around him, trying to find out who he was, and something with which he could align his talents and energy. You could almost see him asking himself, "Where do I fit? What is my passion and purpose, and where are my people?"

George has been a young man pushing the boundaries and seeking an identity. The things that give many of us that sense of purpose and place have not worked for him. Other than our immediate family, we do not have relatives in Virginia, a "clan." He never connected with our church, the people there, or the faith that was important to us. In recent years we watched with dismay as he became attracted to some groups that were not respectful of others, that did not see all people as being created in the image and likeness of God, which is a value for us. They offered him an identity and a place, but not for a good purpose. It was another case for us of, while making our opinions known,

trusting that eventually he would see through the lies and come to his senses. That did happen, but unfortunately not soon enough to keep him from the serious trouble he is in.

The changes I have seen in George are profound. Although this is not education I would ever have wished for him, I am edified to see how he has taken advantage of it. He is more serious about life, not as entitled. While incarcerated he worked on improving himself. Because of difficulty with visual processing, George was always a slow reader, and tried to avoid it. For classes he used audio books when needed. While in jail he has pushed himself to read, in an effort to train his brain. He now reads several hours a day. We actually discuss books! I never thought I would see that. He has also established a schedule for himself that he hopes to maintain when released. He gets up at 4am, in order to have personal time for meditation and writing before the jail gets loud. He has an exercise schedule, reads, and writes letters. He has sent many encouraging letters to his brothers, and notes of gratitude to us. George has said that these six months were his time in an "iron monastery," and that he doesn't want to lose the spiritual formation he has received there.

While George has always been a faithful friend and encourager to those within his circle, his circle was limited to people like him. Therefore it has been gratifying to see the change in George in empathy and compassion. It is tempting for intelligent and capable people to become arrogant, and that was the case with George. He was so bright that sometimes he was impatient with those who struggled. He couldn't understand why people with other capabilities didn't just shape up and do things differently. While in jail he has been exposed to a new world. Many of his fellows come from difficult backgrounds. It has been an eye-opener for George to talk with men who were born addicted to heroin, who have no education or family support, who cycle in and out of jail because they are felons and can't get a job. A few months ago, George was telling me some of this, and stated, "When I get out, I am going to hire felons! There are some good guys in here who never got a break." That made me really happy, to see my boy have this compassion and understanding, and a desire to help.

Through all his searching, George has always talked openly with us, especially to his dad. I believe we know his heart and mind, and we have seen how he has grown. This difficult re-set is the beginning of a better and useful life for George, but one that could be derailed by a further prison environment. I ask for leniency in sentencing.

Thank you.

Margaret Pickard